

# Parallelism in transformation motives of Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Stevenson and The Metamorphosis by Kafka

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## ABSTRACT

Two great novelists, Franz Kafka and Robert Louis Stevenson at first blush seem to have absolutely nothing in common. But a detailed analysis of two distinguished works of the writers, reveals surprising similarities in some aspects of their storylines. In particular, comparison of Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with The Metamorphosis of Kafka shows that both works depict the issues of the struggle between Good and Evil through elements of metamorphoses that have common roots and motives. Focusing on the ideas that are implied rather than explicitly stated unveils deep correlation between these two seemingly unrelated novels.

**Keywords:** Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis, Robert Louis Stevenson, Kafka, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, transformation, comparative analysis, world literature, Vladimir Nabokov.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Both Robert Louis Stevenson and Franz Kafka are prominent writers. And although they didn't have much in common, there was a thin thread connecting their vision of human nature from the philosophical point of view. This similarity becomes especially obvious in Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Kafka's The Metamorphosis, where the transformation of the main hero was used as a tool for depicting ambiguity of every person's inner world. The noted connection can be explained by many small details that influenced the formation of world perception of the two authors throughout their life.

Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on November 13, 1850, in the family of Thomas and Margaret Stevenson. His father's profession was lighthouse designing, so following his steps, at the age 17, Robert enrolled at Edinburgh University to study engineering, with the goal of continuing the family business. Lighthouse design never appealed to Stevenson, though, and he began studying law instead. His spirit of adventure truly began to appear at this stage, and during his summer vacations he traveled to France to be around young artists, both writers and painters. He emerged from law school in 1875, but did not practice, as, by this point, he felt that his calling was to be a writer.[1]

Readers have often commented on the pleasure of reading Stevenson's prose, one of the most famous of these was Jorge Luis Borges who, listing the things that please him ends with 'the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson' [2]. Borges' declaration is all the more striking for being made in the 1950s when Stevenson was still ignored by most literary critics. Stevenson encourages a metalinguistic kind of reading, where aspects of textual organization, word order, rhythm, sound and choice of words are all observed and enjoyed. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in his letters discussing Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 'Stevenson is a master of consummate style, and each phrase is finished as in poetry.' [3] Stevenson was chronically afflicted with tuberculosis, and dabbled with various psychotropic drugs such as alcohol, cannabis, and opium. He is well known for his dark and sinister tales like Markheim, Thrawn Janet, and racy adventure novels such as Treasure Island and Kidnapped. Successful and famous, Stevenson died at a young age in 1894. Interestingly enough, Stevenson later claimed that the plot of The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was revealed to him in a dream.[4]

As to Franz Kafka, he was a German-speaking novelist and short-story writer, widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20th-century literature. He was born on July 3, 1883 in a middle-class, German-speaking Ashkenazi Jews family in the capital of the Czech Republic, Prague (at that time the capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia, a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). His father, Hermann Kafka (1854–1931), was the fourth child of Jakob Kafka [5], a ritual slaughterer in a Czech village called Osek in southern Bohemia, which was densely populated by Jews [6]. Hermann decided to move the family to Prague. For some time, he worked as a travelling sales representative, and then became a fashion retailer with about 15 employees. The logo of his products was a jackdaw (pronounced and colloquially written in Czech as "kafka"). Kafka's mother, Julie (1856–1934), was the daughter of Jakob Lowy, a prosperous retail merchant in Podebrady, and was better educated than her husband [7]. Franz trained as a lawyer and after completing his legal education was employed full-time by an insurance company, forcing him to relegate writing to his spare time.

Complex nature of Kafka's works led to formation of many different interpretations of their content. Max Brod and Kafka's first English translators, Edwin Muir and his wife, Willa, viewed his novels as allegories of divine grace. Existentialists have seen Kafka's environment of guilt and despair as the ground upon which to construct an authentic existence. Some have seen his neurotic involvement with his father as the heart of his work. Others have emphasized the social criticism, the inhumanity of the powerful and their agents, the violence and barbarity that lurk beneath normal routine. Some have found an imaginative anticipation of totalitarianism in the random and faceless bureaucratic terror of *The Trial*. The Surrealists delighted in the persistent intrusions of the absurd. There is evidence in both the works and the diaries for each of these interpretations, but Kafka's work as a whole transcends them all. One critic may have put it most accurately when he wrote of the works as "open parables" whose final meanings can never be rounded off. [8]

Both authors were from average level families, and were well educated. Both were suffering from illnesses and died young. This might be one of the reasons why Kafka and Stevenson had approximately the same understanding of human soul, if we accept that their works reflected their internal point of view. By analyzing and comparing *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* with *The Metamorphosis* we can draw parallel lines revealing same views of the writers in addressing ancient problem of the struggle between Good and Evil inside a single living creature.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

One might object by stating that there is nothing in common between the mentioned works, as well as the authors in general. But to see the interconnection, it is necessary to put aside the storyline and concentrate on the motives of unusual events that take place in each work. In Kafka's story it happens in the very beginning, when Gregor Samsa wakes up and understands that he is not a human being anymore. While Stevenson reveals the unnatural transformation at the end of his work. In both cases a shapeshifting took place, and its motives are vividly interrelated.

In discussing the relationship between two novels Vladimir Nabokov noted that if we consider the *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* story as an allegory—the struggle between Good and Evil within every man—then this allegory is tasteless and childish. To the type of mind that would see an allegory here, its shadow play would also postulate physical happenings which common sense knows to be impossible; but actually in the setting of the story, as viewed by a commonsensical mind, nothing at first sight seems to run counter to general human experience. And he suggested that a second look shows that the setting of the story does run counter to general human experience, and that Utterson and the other men around Jekyll are, in a sense, as fantastic as Mr. Hyde. Unless we see them in a fantastic light, there is no enchantment. And if the enchanter leaves and the storyteller and the teacher remain alone together, they make poor company. [9] However, being a big fan of Kafka, Nabokov overlooks the similarities in nature of the basic elements of transformation in both novels. He states that the story of Jekyll and Hyde is beautifully constructed, but it is an old one. Its moral is preposterous since neither good nor evil is actually depicted: on the whole, they are taken for granted, and the struggle goes on between two empty outlines. The enchantment lies in the art of Stevenson's fancywork; but since art and thought, manner and matter, are inseparable, there must be something of the same kind about the structure of the story, too. There is a flaw in the artistic realization of the story—if we consider form and content separately—a flaw

which is missing in Gogol's *The Carrick* and in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The fantastic side of the setting—Utterson, Enfield, Poole, Lanyon, and their London—is not of the same quality as the fantastic side of Jekyll's hydization. [10] But the analysis of the background of this so called hydization, reveals a deep belief of author in ambivalent nature of every human. Which Nabokov did not find necessary to mention. To demonstrate the similarities in motivation of the *metamorphosis*, there should be an understanding of the core meaning of the transformation motive as a term.

### 3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The motives of transformation refer to the plot-forming motives. As it was defined by Tomashevsky, motives can be distinguished by types of motivations as: compositional, realistic and artistic. [11] The very same idea was supported by T. V. Illarionova in her work devoted to the Yakut epos. [12]

The analysis of *The Metamorphosis* reveals that the primary motive of main hero's transformation was to demonstrate the difference between the real situation and the one people are used to create in their imagination. That is depicting the life of an insect was used as a tool to contrast the individual life perception with the logical facts. Actually the writer skips the process of metamorphosis, thus pointing out that this is not important for the storyline. Just a single sentence stating: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" [13], is the only explanation of this unusual process. Nevertheless, the events that followed the transformation make the reader understand what is the main idea of the work and why the transformation is not that critical.

Analyzing the transformation in Kafka's story Vladimir Nabokov said that change, though shocking and striking, is not quite so odd as might be assumed at first glance. A commonsensical commentator (Paul L. Landsberg in *The Kafka Problem* [1946], ed. Angel Flores) notes that "When we go to bed in unfamiliar surroundings, we are apt to have a moment of bewilderment upon awakening, a sudden sense of unreality, and this experience must occur over and over again in the life of a commercial traveler, a manner of living that renders impossible any sense of continuity." The sense of reality depends upon continuity, upon duration. After all, awakening as an insect is not much different from awakening as Napoleon or George Washington. (I knew a man who awoke as the Emperor of Brazil.) On the other hand, the isolation, and the strangeness, of so-called reality—this is, after all, something which constantly characterizes the artist, the genius, the discoverer. The Samsa family around the fantastic insect is nothing else than mediocrity surrounding genius. [14] And that is the key point of the story. The motive of transformation is not about the shapeshifting of Gregor, but mostly about the *metamorphosis* in behavior of people surrounding him. So this is where the first parallel can be drawn to connect *The Metamorphosis* with the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Unlike Kafka's, Stevenson's story is constructed around the event of transformation, but in the core lies the idea of addressing the eternal struggle of Good with Evil, which again leads to the issue of human behavior. As it was mentioned above the very first sentence of *The Metamorphosis*, logically should be considered as an element of transformation within the storyline, but in fact the real transformations are going to happen further in the text, and will have nothing in common with the magic. In a very short period of time Gregor's family members evolve from good and polite into angry and antagonistic persons. Even his sister, who seemed to care about Gregor the most, finally became rude and just like all the other members obviously disliked her own brother after his appearance has changed. All family members transformed from Good to Evil; except for Gregor, his transformation was from normal to hideous. [15] And all this changes, as well as all the events that accompanied that changes are some sort of metaphorical reflection of rude and straight evolution of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde. In Stevenson's story one character transforms from good to evil motivated by scientific reasons and the desire for pleasure, while in Kafka's work the same transformation occurs with several characters. And considering the fact that their evolution was caused by a strong desire to avoid unpleasant contact with their own family member, it can be concluded that after all their ultimate motive was pleasure – pleasure of not seeing the hideous insect. So there is a direct parallel link between Dr. Jekyll and the members of Samsa family, the difference is only in the approach of describing the subject chosen by two talented authors.

When it comes to Gregor, his transformation has also much in common with the Jekyll and Hyde case. Although nothing in the story unveils the core motive of Gregor's metamorphosis, the story gives an idea that shape shifting was not unreasonable. Thoughts and memories of the insect make reader understand that before transformation there was an internal conflict, hidden dissatisfaction with the current state of things. His family was not rich, his father didn't work, and Gregor had to work hard to support his family but his efforts were considered as unsatisfactory by his employer.[16] And the feeling of dissatisfaction as the key motive for transformation is one more common characteristic joining the storylines of the two novels. However, this motive is just implied in Kafka's work, while in Stevenson's case it is directly pronounced by Dr. Jekyll in his letter:

Analysis of the word of Dr. Jekyll in his letter:"Perhaps I had one fault that was hard to overcome. I was a free spirit and liked to get into mischief once in a while. Nothing terrible, mind you. But I was told that any such behavior in public was not acceptable to my family. They reminded me time and time again that I was to act like a gentleman at all times. So I had to learn at a young age to hide my impish ways." [17], unveils internal conflict and can be directly correlated to the feelings of Gregor. Both Henry Jekyll and Gregor Samsa were young and educated, both cared about their reputations, and both had an internal conflict, that finally led to appearance of Edward Hyde, in one case and a gigantic insect in the second. The motive of the metamorphosis was generally the same.

Another noteworthy point is that Stevenson's novel depicts only one case of shape shifting, which is quite clearly described in the final part of the storyline, while Kafka's work in a sophisticated manner pictures a much more complex metamorphosis that has happened with the family members of the main hero. This transformation has nothing to do with magic, as it was mentioned above, it is related to the behavior and attitude of people going through a difficult period of their life. Unpleasant creature living in their house, constantly claiming attention and bringing no benefit to the family, definitely caused dissatisfaction, and leads to transfiguration of kind into cruel and good into evil. And again it resembles the situation with Dr. Jekyll. The transformation motives again coincide. The difference here is that this aspect of Kafka's work is more realistic, while Stevenson's story is in a way more fantastic. Both are fantasies in fact, but as Vladimir Nabokov reasonably noted: "(Stevenson's) story does run counter to general human experience"[18]

And finally, the resolution of the transformation motives is again quite parallel in both stories. The main hero of the Stevenson's novel resolved his problems by killing himself, thus finishing all the problems caused by his dualism. In the same manner, the problems of Gregor Samsa come to an end after the death of the insect. And the last paragraph of Kafka's story helps the reader to understand that not only Gregor found relief, but also his family was quite glad to know that the insect is dead. So, the similarity here is in that the cure for the metamorphosis in each of the stories is the death of the main hero.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Everything mentioned above clearly demonstrate deep interconnection between the transformation motives in two seemingly unrelated novels. Definitely, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Stevenson and The Metamorphosis by Kafka are quite different works from the point of stylistics, approach, storyline and language, but the element of transformation contained in them are bound through the internal feelings and the nature of the main hero, and the circumstances surrounding them. The internal conflict, the feeling of dissatisfaction, the dependence on other people's opinion and care about the reputation are just some of the points that can be considered as the triggers of metamorphosis in both masterpieces. Although works at first sight seem to have nothing in common, above step-by-step comparison unveils hidden parallels in aspects of transformations described in them.

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